

Israel Seizes Gaza-Bound Boat in “Act of Piracy”

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Palestinian children take part in a rally to show support for the latest attempt to break the siege of Gaza by sea, at the Gaza City port on 28 June 2015. Ashraf Amra/APA images

Israeli forces boarded and commandeered the *Marianne* on Monday, one of four boats that were bound for Gaza in the latest attempt to break the tight Israeli siege of the occupied territory.

At around 2 am Gaza time *Marianne* was surrounded by three Israeli navy boats while in international waters more than 100 miles off the coast of Gaza, organizers Freedom Flotilla III [said in a press release](#).

“After that we lost contact with the *Marianne* and at 05:11 am (Gaza time) the IDF [Israeli army] announced that they had ‘visited and searched’ *Marianne*,” the press release states. “They had captured the boat and detained all on board ‘in international waters’ as they admitted themselves. The only positive content in the IDF announcement was that they still recognize that there is a naval blockade of Gaza, despite the Netanyahu government’s recent denial that one exists.”

Organizers called the seizure of the boat and its passengers an “act of piracy.”

Israel’s *Haaretz* [reports](#) that the boat is being towed to Usdud (Ashdod), a port in present-day Israel, where the passengers “will be interrogated before being escorted to Ben Gurion Airport and flown out of Israel.”

The [18 passengers](#) aboard the *Marianne* include Basel Ghattas, a Palestinian citizen of Israel and member of the Israeli parliament, former Tunisian president Moncef Marzuki, Spanish member of the European Parliament Ana Miranda and Professor Robert Lovelace, retired chief of the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation in Canada.

Many Palestinians had eagerly awaited the flotilla, hoping that it would call international attention to the siege which Israel imposed eight years ago.



Members of the crew of the Marianne, which was seized by Israeli forces in international waters early on 29 June as it headed toward Gaza.

Freedom Flotilla III

Three other boats – *Rachel*, *Vittorio* and *Juliano II* – that also made up the flotilla have [headed back to their ports of origin](#).

In total, 47 passengers from 17 countries were aboard the boats, which carried medicines, solar panels and above all a strong message of solidarity for the 1.8 million Palestinians still besieged in Gaza one year after Israel began its 51-day destructive assault that killed more than 2,200 people.

An [independent UN Human Rights Council inquiry](#) into the attack, published last week, found extensive evidence of war crimes approved by Israel's leaders at the "highest level."

Violence incitement

Ghattas joined the flotilla despite violent threats and incitement from fellow lawmakers in Israel to lift his parliamentary immunity so that he could be prosecuted.

Yair Lapid, head of Israel's purportedly centrist Yesh Atid party, for instance [denounced the flotilla](#) as a "provocation against the state of Israel."

"This is a flotilla of a group of terror supporters a heinous flotilla that needs to be stopped," Lapid added. "We need to act against the flotilla the same way we do when dispersing a violent protest and these guys need to all be arrested."

In a [Huffington Post column](#) on Sunday, he defended his right to take part in the flotilla.

Bigots in “a discriminatory Jewish state as a white Southern extremist in a Confederate state, seek to diminish the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel and their representatives in the parliament,” Ghattas writes.

“More than anything, it is obvious that the situation of Palestinians in Gaza will inevitably lead to another round of bloody war, perhaps even more horrifying than the one we had less than one year ago,” Ghattas adds. “Still, my very outspoken colleagues in the Knesset would not even consider lifting the blockade as a means to avoid future war.”

“No siege on Gaza”

In a statement Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu justified the seizure of the *Marianne* claiming that the “flotilla is nothing but a demonstration of hypocrisy and lies that is only assisting the Hamas terrorist organization and ignores all of the horrors in our region.”

Netanyahu insisted that “preventing entry by sea was done in accordance with international law and even received backing from a committee of the UN Secretary General.”

“Israel is the only democracy that defends itself in accordance with international law,” Netanyahu insisted, adding that “there is no siege on Gaza.”

The fact that 18 civilians aboard a yacht cannot sail to Gaza, and that there has been virtually no reconstruction in Gaza since Israel’s attack last year would tend to undermine Netanyahu’s contention.

According to *Haaretz*, after boarding the boat, Israeli army gunmen were “to hand out a letter issued by the Prime Minister’s Office, welcoming [the captives] to Israel and wondering why they sailed to Gaza and not Syria.”

“Perhaps you meant to sail somewhere else nearby – Syria, where Assad’s regime is massacring his people every day, with the support of the murderous Iranian regime,” the letter would reportedly state.

Netanyahu’s statement did not specify which UN “committee” he was talking about, but this was a likely reference to the 2011 “Palmer report” commissioned by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon into Israel’s attack the previous year on the [Mavi Marmara](#).

Turkey rejected the report into the assault that killed 10 of its citizens on the *Mavi Marmara* in international waters and [imposed sanctions on Israel](#).

The inquiry was heavily criticized for bias. The four-member committee that wrote the Palmer report was chaired by former New Zealand Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer and vice-chaired by former president of Colombia Alvaro Uribe, [a notorious human rights abuser close to Israel](#).

The inquiry commissioned by Ban was in addition to an [official UN Human Rights Council fact-finding mission](#) which found that Israel’s attack on the 2010 flotilla was illegal.

Determined

“It is disappointing that the Israeli government chose to continue the absolutely fruitless

policy of 'no tolerance,' meaning it will continue to enforce an inhumane and illegal collective punishment against 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza," flotilla organizers said in their statement.

"Israel's repeated acts of state piracy in international waters are worrying signs that the occupation and blockade policy extends to the entire eastern Mediterranean."

They also urged governments "to ensure that all passengers and crew from the *Marianne* are safe, and to strongly protest against the violation of international maritime law by the Israeli state."

"We call on all civil society organizations to condemn the actions of Israel," the statement concludes. "People all over the world will continue to respond and react to this injustice, as will we, until the port of Gaza is open and the siege and occupation is ended."

This video, published on 20 June, shows *Marianne* calling at the Italian port of Messina for a solidarity visit.

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